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Special issue : Working with our User Communities to Develop Library Services.

Developing a peer to peer library support scheme

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Background to the scheme

For the past two years, the University of Nottingham has run a scheme in which science and engineering students have been acting as library student ambassadors (Learning Resource Leaders) to engage their peers on library issues. The project was based upon the premise that science and engineering students make less use of their library resources than other disciplines, and began with a project to employ library student ambassadors, funded by a Teaching Innovation Award at Loughborough University. This inspired a joint HE STEM funded project between Loughborough University and the University of Nottingham to find a sustainable (non-pay) model for motivating science and engineering students to act as change agents in the library. The project included library staff from both institutions as well as an academic member of staff from an appropriate discipline to add valuable credence to the project.

Motivating and recruiting students

Focus groups were run with students from Loughborough University at the start of the project to ascertain what would motivate them to volunteer for a library ambassador scheme. The title of the role generated a lot of discussion. Students were motivated by employability and enhancing their CVs and they felt that science and engineering employers would not be engaged by the word "library" in the title of the role. Instead, a role title of Learning Resource Leader was chosen.

The students at Nottingham were recruited by delivering a 60 second elevator pitch on one way the library could be improved and both Nottingham and Loughborough appointed two students as Learning Resource Leaders. The following year, the two universities ran the schemes separately and 4 students were appointed at Nottingham, covering a range of science and engineering disciplines.

The sustainable aspect of the project identified a corporate sponsor, Jaguar LandRover (JLR) to provide three tiers of incentives for the LRLs to achieve. These included corporate freebies for completing level 1 and 2 and for level 3, a track day was provided.

In the second year, the Nottingham Advantage Award was also offered as an incentive. This is an employability award that requires 10 hours of training and 20 hours of volunteer work from the students. To pass the award, the students need to produce a number of reflective pieces on the employability skills gained from the project. The introduction of the Advantage Award definitely seemed to provide an added incentive for students to engage with the scheme.

Activities

The main role of the LRLs was to promote the library to their peers in creative ways and the students decided to set up stands in various parts of the science and engineering buildings or social spaces. The idea was to take the library outside of the physical building

and to publicise library services and resources. In a bid to entice students to the stand, we were able to provide freebies from publishers and suppliers and the LRLs created a giant Jenga game to provide interest. The students wore a T-shirt to publicise their role and to publicise the JLR sponsorship.

The students also produced a short online survey that they distributed in various ways. The survey served the purpose of obtaining feedback for us in the library but also to use as a promotion for some lesser known or used services. Although the project manager gave suggestions as to what we might like them to cover, the students were left to create the questions themselves with minimal input from the library.

In the second year of running, each LRL identified a service or facility that they wished to promote, which was showcased on a t-shirt of their own design which they sourced themselves. The promoted services included;

- Promotion of iPad loans
- Feedback mechanisms
- Using the Library online catalogue
- Finding books on the shelf/understanding the classmark system

The students were also keen to hold stands again and to produce a survey which they analysed and presented the results to library staff. The aim was also to create some videos that could be used in induction sessions but time to produce these ran out.

Benefits of the scheme

From the library perspective, having an academic member of staff on the project was really useful in promoting the scheme to faculties but also provided a good liaison opportunity more generally.

The scheme was also useful in trying to break down some of the perceived formal barriers between students and library staff, and the LRLs particularly enjoyed the training that they received from library staff, understanding the usefulness of search skills for themselves and for their peers, and reporting back to us on their increased use of databases to source material for their academic work.

The peer to peer engagement was useful as students seemed happy to approach the LRLs at their stands and ask questions. The design of the survey was written in more "student speak" and perhaps gained a greater number of responses than if we had designed and distributed the survey from within the library.

Generally, the students got a better understanding of the challenges that libraries face when providing information and one of the LRLs attended a Faculty Library User Group which she reflected gave her the first opportunity to attend a formal committee meeting and to hear the requirements that academic staff need from library services.

Most of all, the LRLs gained transferable and employability skills from the project, including team working, communication, persuasion, marketing and design, and presentation skills. The LRLs reflection suggested that they were unable to gain these types of skills from their academic work, but realised the importance of these competences.

Challenges

The scheme has not been without its challenges, with timetabling presenting the main problem. Finding a time when students could attend training was particularly difficult, particularly in STEM subject areas where students are timetabled for most of the week.

There was also some tension between the project being peer-led rather than service-led. Peer to peer support is all about students reaching out in a way that will resonate with their contemporaries. Sometimes the message is not quite as we would communicate and this could be uncomfortable with some library staff. Additionally, we wanted to empower the students by giving them ownership of their activities, which meant that we tried not to direct their work to any great degree. This did however result in a larger workload for the project manager in supervising and mentoring the LRLs.

Luckily, most of the LRLs were very conscientious and motivated. However, problems can arise if one of the team doesn't pull their weight and this can add an additional burden on the project manager. However, projects like these can also be an excellent development opportunity for library staff who may not have a management element to their work to acquire some supervisory experience.

Where next?

The scheme was expanded this year to include students from all faculties, although interestingly most of the interest continued to come from within the STEM subject areas. Would changing the role title to include the word library encourage more humanities and social science students to engage?

Activities have been more directed this year, but without losing the creative input of the students. The LRLS have been asked to concentrate specifically on creating videos that could be used in induction sessions or presented on webpages and already the students are coming up with some entertaining ideas for presenting library services.

To date, the students have gained much from the scheme, enhancing their CVs, receiving sponsor rewards, and even presenting at a conference. However, the jury is still out as to whether library staff time required in leading the LRLs is consummate with the delivered outcomes.

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How to make peer-to-peer support and learning effective in the public sector? Matt Andrews and Nick Manning • 2016. Effective Institutions Platform. These stages combine into a peer learning process map (shown in Figure 1 below) and involve: 1. A pre-foundational engagement where consideration is given to basic questions about peer engagement. 2. A foundational event. 3. A period whereby peer engagement is sustained over time (to build trust and sharing). Peer-to-peer (P2P) computing or networking is a distributed application architecture that partitions tasks or workloads between peers. Peers are equally privileged, equipotent participants in the application. They are said to form a peer-to-peer network of nodes. Peers make a portion of their resources, such as processing power, disk storage or network bandwidth, directly available to other network participants, without the need for central coordination by servers or stable hosts. Peers are both i've got a university project where i need to develop a peer to peer system in java for file sharing. So in essence several users should be able to share files using the Peer to Peer System. Can someone give me some guidelines about how to build this system?? java p2p. share | improve this question |. follow. | asked Feb 7 '11 at 11:03. NoorNoor. 17.2k3434 gold badges121121 silver badges233233 bronze badges.